

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PFOR, IT, PINT
SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH DEFENSE MINISTER RUFFINI ON ITALIAN
POLITICAL SITUATION

1. MINISTER RUFFINI ASKED TO SEE ME ON JANUARY 19 TO EXPLAIN THAT, IN LIGHT OF THE FALL OF THE GOVERNMENT, HE FEELS HE MUST WITHDRAW HIS PREVIOUS ACCEPTANCE OF SECDEF BROWN'S KIND INVITATION TO HIM TO VISIT WASHINGTON IN FEBRUARY. SIMILARLY, HE FELT HE HAD TO DECLINE ANOTHER INVITATION TO VISIT THE USS NIMITZ. HE SAID THAT HE HAD WRITTEN SECRETARY BROWN SEVERAL DAYS AGO AND THAT HE HOPED, IF HE SHOULD BE DEFENSE MINISTER IN A SUBSEQUENT GOVERNMENT, THAT THE VISIT TO WASHINGTON WOULD BE POSSIBLE AT SOME FUTURE DATE.

2. RUFFINI REFERRED TO THE DEPARTMENT'S JANUARY 12 STATEMENT AND CHARACTERIZED IT AS "PERFECT" BOTH IN TIMING AND IN CONTENT. HE SAID ALL BUT A SMALL MINORITY IN THE DC FELT THE SAME WAY. HE TOOK THE OCCASION TO REFER TO FONMIN FORLANI'S PUBLIC STATEMENT ROME 0893) AND CHARACTERIZED IT AS "UNFORTUNATE." IN DELICATE LANGUAGE, HE SUGGESTED THAT SOMETIMES PEOPLE'S PERSONAL AMBITIONS (TO BE THE NEXT PRIME MINISTER?) OBSCURE THEIR VISION ON BASIC AND FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE.

3. TURNING TO THE ITALIAN POLITICAL SCENE, RUFFINI EXPRESSED
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PAGE 02 ROME 01263 201856Z

THE VIEW THAT ELECTIONS ARE "PROBABLE." HE EXPLAINED THIS CONCLUSION BASICALLY IN TERMS OF A HARDENING OF THE PCI POSITION WHICH HE SAID OCCURRED ABOUT A WEEK AGO, COINCIDENTALLY WITH CERVETTI'S RETURN FROM MOSCOW. HE SPECULATED THAT THERE MAY HAVE BEEN SOME RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO EVENTS, ALTHOUGH HE OBVIOUSLY WASN'T SURE. HE DID, HOWEVER, SEEM CERTAIN THAT THERE WAS A NOTICEABLE HARDENING OF THE PCI POSTION AND, SHOULD IT CONTINUE ON ITS PRESENT

LINE, ELECTIONS WOULD BE AVOIDABLE. HE ALSO SPECULATED AT SOME LENGTH ABOUT COMPETITION AMONG THE LEADERSHIP OF THE PARTY AND THE APPEARANCE THAT THE PRO-SOVIET HARDLINERS ARE GAINING IN STRENGTH AND MAY BE PREPARING TO OUST BERLINGUER.

4. IN THE COURSE OF THE ABOVE DISCUSSION, RUFFINI URGED ME TO DO ANYTHING I COULD TO CHANGE THE PRESENT ATTITUDE OF UGO LA MALFA, FAVORING PCI ENTRY INTO THE GOVERNMENT. BY COINCIDENCE I HAD DINNER WITH LA MALFA AND SEVERAL OF HIS OLD FRIENDS ON JANUARY 19. LA MALFA'S VIEW OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY WAS DISCUSSED AT LENGTH ON THAT OCCASION. THE ARGUMENTS OF HIS OLD FRIENDS SEEM TO HAVE MADE LA MALFA BEGIN TO QUESTION THE CORRECTNESS OF HIS GENEROUS CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE DEMOCRATIC CHARACTER OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY. IT IS DIFFICULT TO TELL HOW DEEP A DENT HIS FRIENDS MADE, BUT WE WILL CONTINUE THE EFFORT BECAUSE THE ATTITUDE OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY WILL HAVE CONSIDERABLE INFLUENCE ON HOW THE PRESENT CRISIS IS RESOLVED. GARDNER

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